

Cyprus



PHILIP MARK, ASSOCIATED PRESS

The grieving mother of a Greek Cypriot who was battered to death by Turkish Cypriots while demonstrating in the buffer zone at Dherinia, August 1996.

Death on the ceasefire line

In August 1996 an international contingent of motorcyclists arrived in Nicosia announcing that it would end divisions in Cyprus by riding through the lines that separate the Greek and Turkish sectors. Although the Cypriot President Clerides prevailed on the motorcyclists not to try to force their way through, some of them rode up and down the ceasefire line, penetrating the buffer zone, lighting fires and approaching the Turkish positions. At Dherinia the Turkish Cypriots, seeing several hundred Greek Cypriot demonstrators pouring into the buffer zone shouting insults and throwing stones, released about a thousand counter-

demonstrators, including paramilitaries, to beat up the intruders with batons and iron bars, killing one of them. Three days later, on the occasion of the dead man's funeral, a cousin of the dead man climbed a Turkish flagpole on the edge of the Turkish lines to pull down the Turkish flag. He was shot dead.

The incidents, during which 19 UN soldiers were injured, were seen on world television. Both sides had made their point: the Greek Cypriots that Cyprus is not a dead issue but one that is liable to flare up at any minute; the Turkish Cypriots that anybody who crosses the line without authority dies. In a number of European capitals it was realized that Cyprus's membership of the European Union might mean real trouble.

Cyprus: divided at independence

Although Cyprus lies close to the Turkish coast, its majority population has been Greek by language and culture for more than 3,000 years. Following the Ottoman capture of the island in the sixteenth century, Turks settled there and some Greek-speakers converted to Islam. Approximately one-fifth of Cyprus's population became culturally and linguistically Turkish. The Turkish population contends that it is not a minority but a separate and equal community. For centuries, most Greek and Turkish Cypriots had been able to live peacefully alongside members of the opposite community.

After the Second World War, opposition to British colonial rule was led by the elected Archbishop of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, and by George Grivas, a Cyprus-born Greek colonel of extreme right-wing views. In 1955 Grivas and his underground army EOKA launched a campaign of sabotage. The British tried to suppress the revolt. In negotiations with Greece and Turkey, Britain stated that if self-determination was ever to be granted, it would have to be granted to both Cypriot communities. By 1957–8 Turkish Cypriots had a paramilitary force. Violence flared again with EOKA attacking Turkish police and burning Turkish villages in retaliation.

Following a ceasefire, Greece, Turkey and Britain entered into talks, and Cyprus gained independence in August 1960 with a Constitution drawn up in terms of the two communities. Greek Cypriots felt that the Turkish community's constitutional privileges were preposterous; the Turkish Cypriots viewed these as the bare minimum. Both sides had armed in secret. In 1963 a major Greek Cypriot attack against the Turks took place in Nicosia and Larnaca. In 1964 fighting flared between neighbouring villages, leaving many dead on both sides. Some 20,000 Turkish Cypriots fled, many taking refuge in Kyrenia and Nicosia. Food and medical supplies had to be shipped in from Turkey. Turkish troops were positioned in the north, Turkish jets buzzed Nicosia and the Turkish fleet set sail for Cyprus. Alarmed, Makarios agreed that the British should intervene from the British Sovereign Bases on Cyprus. This produced a ceasefire in Nicosia, an exchange of hostages, and the establishment of the neutral 'Green Line' between the Greek and Turkish sectors which is still in place. Greek and Turkish Cypriot ministers remained on opposite sides of the line. From this time on, Turkish Cypriots believe that there has been no legal Government in Cyprus.

Makarios demanded termination of the 1960 agreements and offered the Turkish Cypriots minority rights, which they rejected. The Turks said the two communities should be physically separated and demanded a federal state with a border between Turkish and Greek provinces, or, failing that, a frontier across Cyprus linking the north with Turkey and the south with Greece.

The British were unable to prevent Greek Cypriot attacks on Turkish Cypriots at Limassol, causing widespread casualties; Turkey announced its fleet was sailing for Cyprus. It became necessary to bring in the United Nations, and the UNFICYP (UN Force in Cyprus) was established in March 1964. The UN force, which still remains, was able to prevent many killings

from both sides, but there were repeated outbreaks of fighting. Makarios formed a National Guard, and 20,000 Greek troops arrived on Cyprus. Grivas, in command of these troops and the National Guard, launched an attack at Kokkina where the Turks were bringing in arms and troops from Turkey. Planes from Turkey attacked Greek positions, until a UN ceasefire took hold. Half or more of the Turkish Cypriot community was now compressed into disconnected enclaves. The (Greek) Cypriot Government imposed an economic blockade, which was soon modified under international pressures to let in quotas of food. Limited passage and commerce existed between Greek and Turkish areas.

In 1967 democracy was overthrown in Greece. Makarios, opposed to union with a military dictatorship, began cutting the National Guard's budget, building up his own paramilitary force and becoming more amenable to UN suggestions for easing tension. In November, Grivas attacked Turkish Cypriot fighters at Kophinou. Turkey sent an ultimatum to the junta in Athens; the Turkish Air Force made sorties over Greek Thrace; and troops were concentrated on the Greco-Turkish border. Through US shuttle diplomacy an agreement between Greece and Turkey was reached, but only partially implemented.

The 1974 crisis and its consequences

In July 1974 the Greek Cypriot National Guard overthrew the Cypriot Government, replacing Makarios with Nicos Sampson, a former EOKA member. Ankara gave Athens an ultimatum. After the junta sent an equivocal answer, Turkish troops landed near Kyrenia, meeting with fierce resistance. The way they were reputed to treat civilians as they occupied Greek Cypriot villages – with many indications of mass murders of civilians – spread terror. By the time the UN obtained a ceasefire the Turks had secured a



Greek Cypriots light candles at the Monastery of St Andreas, the holiest site of the Orthodox faithful in the Turkish-occupied area of Cyprus, August 1997. In a landmark goodwill gesture, 600 Greek Cypriots were allowed into the Turkish-occupied area of Cyprus to visit the shrine.

narrow corridor between Kyrenia and Nicosia, which they then widened in violation of the terms. The cost had been to expose the Turkish enclaves to occupation or siege by the National Guard and paramilitaries, who in some cases took brutal revenge.

The Greek junta collapsed. In Nicosia, Sampson gave up the presidency to Makarios's constitutional deputy, Clerides. More Turkish reinforcements arrived, more Greek Cypriot villages were occupied and their inhabitants driven out; Turkish enclaves in the south were occupied, besieged and shelled. In August 1974 a new Turkish attack took over even more territory until 36.5 per cent of Cyprus was under Turkish occupation; this Turkish action created the basic political circumstances of present-day Cyprus. Of a total Greek Cypriot community of 574,000, some 180,000 became refugees. An estimated 3,000 Greek Cypriots and 500 Turkish Cypriots had been killed within a month.

By 1975 President Clerides and the Turkish Cypriot leader Denktaş, agreed that Turkish Cypriots who wished to leave for the north could do so, while the 10,000 or so Greek Cypriots remaining in the north could choose to stay with full minority rights or leave; nearly all left. With small exceptions the island was transformed into two ethnic zones, with a barrier running across the island and through the middle of Nicosia. The ceasefire line is supervised by the UN.

The territory seized by the Turkish Army contained most of the country's cargo-holding capacity and tourist industry, half its agricultural exports and nearly half its industrial production. To provide relief for the refugees and to build up fresh assets, Cypriot Government planners went in for labour-intensive projects and maximum incentives. Economic recovery in the south was rapid, leading Turkish Cypriots to complain that the increasing prosperity gap between the north and the south was due to the south's embargo and the world's *de facto* acceptance of the Government in the south as the Government of the whole island.

The almost total separation of the communities since the mid-1970s meant that there were no ethnic clashes, but this began to change in 1987 when an organized group of Greek Cypriot women broke through into Turkish-occupied territory before being ejected. In July 1989 Greek Cypriot women, led by a Greek Orthodox bishop, again attempted to march through the buffer zone. There were 111 arrests by the Turkish Cypriots.

Diplomatic initiatives, EU membership and the military equation

In November 1983 Denktaş proclaimed an 'independent Turkish Republic of North Cyprus'. Other than Turkey, no state recognized the new entity. In January 1984 the Greek Cypriots presented a 'Framework for a Comprehensive Settlement' to the UN. Many of its provisions still feature in the Greek Cypriot case. Negotiations in 1984-5 yielded nothing. Fresh negotiations began in 1992, when UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented his 'Set of Ideas' for a possible settlement. The Security Council expressed the 'firm expectation' that agreement could be reached within the year and that the transition to a federal

union should be completed during 1993. In July 1993 the UN put forward further proposals. The difficulty, as always, lay in the Greek Cypriots' rejection of any recognition of the north Cyprus 'state' and the Turkish Cypriots' rejection of the Greek Cypriot authorities' right to call themselves the Government of Cyprus.

Following the Government of Cyprus's application for membership of the European Union (EU), the European Commission found in June 1993 'the southern part of the island at least', eligible. The one serious obstacle was the Turkish military occupation of the north, linked to the north's much lower standard of living. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots protested that the Government had no right to act in this matter on behalf of the whole island. In 1994 the Commission recommended that the EU would start negotiations for Cyprus's membership (due to start in 1988), along with a policy of friendly gestures to enlist Turkish cooperation. Most Turkish Cypriots are strongly against entering the EU without Turkey.

Greek Cypriots are aware of the 30,000-35,000 Turkish troops and 4,000-strong Turkish Cypriot force stationed in the north, as opposed to their 10,000-strong Cyprus National Guard plus 950 members of the Greek national contingent. When in January 1997 it became known that the Greek Cypriots had placed an order with Russia for surface-to-air missiles, Turkey declared belligerently that the missiles would not be allowed to be delivered.

Minorities of Cyprus

The question of minority rights in the island, narrowly defined, concerns only the three smaller recognized communities, which, under the 1960 constitutional agreement, had to decide whether to be classified as Greeks or Turks; all lined up with the Christian Greeks rather than the Muslim Turks.

Maronites are the largest of the three minorities, numbering c. 5,000. Before 1974 most lived in four villages in the north. After 1974, 2,000 chose to remain in



Men in Zypern, Turkish-occupied Cyprus.

the Turkish-occupied area; their number has been reduced to 170, whose average age is 68. It has been made virtually impossible for them to bequeath property to the next generation, and permission to cross the ceasefire line is periodically interrupted. The UN visits the villages with supplies of food and medicine, but the Turkish Cypriots have refused a permanent UN presence. The Maronites' main grievance is to have been acknowledged as a religious group, but not as a minority.

Armenians numbered 20,000 after the First World War, but these were mainly in transit. In the 1970s there was a recruitment drive for migration to Soviet Armenia. Sixty families have since returned to Cyprus and been given back Cypriot nationality. In 1963 Armenians living in the Turkish part of Nicosia were forced to move to the south. The Government gave them land to build churches and schools. Many find prospects limited in Cyprus and tend to seek business opportunities abroad. There is considerable intermarriage with Greek Cypriots.

Latins are the smallest of the three communities, claiming 2,000 members. They are Roman Catholics of different national origins including some Latin Americans, who have settled in Cyprus during the past century. Their social and cultural life revolves around their churches.

Fewer than 500 **Greek Cypriots** live on the Karpas peninsula in the north. The UN visits them but complains about restrictions on its freedom of movement. Community members face restrictions in property inheritance and are not allowed to establish a secondary school. They lack private telephones and cannot receive family visitors from the south. Some improvements in their daily life were noted by the UN in 1996.

There are 362 **Turks** living in the south. The UN found in 1995 that they 'were not subjected to a restrictive regime' but were 'often the victims of capricious discrimination or police harassment'. The Government promised to establish a Turkish school in Limassol and a liaison office for Turkish Cypriots' problems.

The search for a peaceful settlement

The year 1998 could be critical for Cyprus, with a presidential election in the south, the scheduled start of EU accession negotiations and Russian missiles due for delivery (with a possibility that the Turks will attempt to intercept them). The USA is expected to play a major role in events.

While, in principle, both communities would prefer Cyprus to be reunited as a federal state before negotiations conclude on entry to the EU, each one of the 15 existing EU members will have to decide what its attitude will be if this does not happen. In the meantime, confidence-building measures should be taken without prejudice to the claims of either side. Continuing bicomunal meetings between Greek and Turkish Cypriot businesspeople, political parties, trade unionists etc., suggest some degree of a willingness to work together. Other joint activities need to be promoted. More openness and flexibility are needed in public discussions on the nature of the possible settlements which could bring about a lasting peace.

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